

Franklinton, N. C.
Oregon Trail

1852

Physical Description: 1 item; letter of 26 pages, legal-size paper.

Acquisition: Gift of Mrs. Donna Goswick, [REDACTED], Louisburg, April 5, 1974. Mrs. Goswick was given the letter by her cousin Miss. Nellie Whitfield, Green Street, Franklinton.

Restriction removed by Mrs. Goswick on 1-28-80 *JP*

LETTER RESTRICTED UNTIL AFTER PUBLICATION BY DONOR

Description: This letter was written by William W. Cooke to his parents Howel and Leah Cooke of Franklinton shortly after he and his family had successfully completed a 5 month trek over the Oregon Trail from Missouri. There is no indication in the letter of when Cooke left North Carolina. (A Franklin County marriage bond indicates a William W. Cooke married an Elizabeth S. Cooke (sic) in 1840; however, the author of this letter was married to an M. J. "Patsy" Cooke. He is not listed in the 1850 census for Franklin County.)

Dated September 25, 1852, the letter was begun almost on arrival in Champeog, Oregon Territory, on the Willamette River, not far from Portland. Cooke is already selfemployed at "hauling" for \$6.00-8.00 per day. After a description of the condition of the area--crops, soil, timber, climate, goods, prices, health - he launches into a day-by-day account of their trip which began April 20, 1852, when he left Missouri with his wife, 4 children, a driver, 10 oxen, 6 cows, and 2 horses in company with 7 other wagons in a train captained by a Jacob (Gillespie). In terse, 1-2 sentence daily accounts copied from a journal Cooke records what was important to the travelers and others who might follow--number of miles per day, condition of the road, availability and quality of water, weather, detours, streams and rivers, straying cattle, family illness, wagon repairs.

Landmarks and forts are mentioned and sometimes described: Independence Rock, Platte River, Wind River Mountains, South Pass, Sulpher Springs, Forts Laramie, Hall, and Boise. The fortitude required and the inherent drama of the journey are set down in matter-of-fact fashion--the dangerous crossings for the wagons and cattle at the rivers, the extortionist ferry and bridge tenders, the careful funeral of Mrs. Nellie Osborne, the death of a beloved young school teacher-driver from New York, the birth and death of their premature daughter named for Cook's mother and favorite aunt.

He allows himself an occasional digression to describe the bedraggled Indians who steal, beg and barter moccasins for biscuits and sugar; the wild animals which Cooke rarely hunted; and Portland--a promising two-year

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old town. In early July as he stood eating snow on a 10 foot snow bank, he entertained himself by thinking of his people in North Carolina, sweltering and "calling on ice and fans to keep you cool."

Main Entry Card

Date Card

1852

Autograph Card

Cooke, William W.

Subject Cards

EMIGRANTS

OREGON TRAIL

Finding Aid completed May 31, 1974, by Ellen Z. McGrew